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SUBJECT: RESOLVING SENEGAL'S EDUCATIONAL CRISIS

REF: DAKAR 00681

SUMMARY

**¶11.** (U) In the past year, Senegal's public education system has been shaken by faculty and student unrest from the university level down. Though the violence that disrupted university campuses in the spring has mostly dissipated, current protests by middle and secondary-school teachers have had an equally debilitating effect. Public school teachers have been withholding grades from students, leading to a showdown with President Abdoulaye Wade that both sides have asked the International Labor Organization (ILO) to resolve. Meanwhile, those who consider education to be the last, best hope for Senegal wonder what the future may hold. For its part, the Mission continues its efforts to work with the Ministry of Education and universities to address school system weaknesses. END SUMMARY.

VIOLENCE ON CAMPUSES

**¶12.** (U) In March, we reported on student protests at Dakar's Cheikh Anta Diop University (UCAD) and Gaston Berger University (UGB) in Saint Louis. The alleged discovery of rotten meat in the cafeteria of the UCAD campus sparked the violence. Police responded aggressively to protests in both cities, resulting in scores of injured students, including one whose leg had to be amputated. Although the "rotten meat" story proved misleading, the incident reflected some fundamental, long-standing problems at the university level, such as lack of housing and crumbling infrastructure. The highly politicized nature of campus life fueled the protests. President Wade alleged the student movement had been "infiltrated" by outside forces.

**¶13.** (U) Although students returned to class, campus tumult did not completely die down. On August 10, students again faced off with police. They were protesting that school stipends (maintenance allowances) had not been paid for several days. They were told there was no money left to pay the allowances. In a brief replay of the March protests, students and police exchanged rocks and tear gas.

THE TEACHERS' TURN TO STRIKE

**¶14.** (U) Unrest has spread to other levels of public education, where 75 percent of Senegalese students attend classes. Labor unions for public middle and secondary school teachers, who earn an average monthly income of 210,000-220,000 CFA francs (CFAF) (USD 420-440), banned together and called for a 48-hour strike in late March to voice their concerns. (NOTE: This salary is significantly

higher than teachers, salaries in many other Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) countries. END NOTE.) A three-day strike followed in mid-April, and Minister of Civil Service, Labor, Employment and Professional Organizations Adama Sall offered to plead the teachers' case to President Wade, who offered no immediate response. By mid-May, the Unitary Framework of Unions of Middle and Secondary School Teachers (CUSEMS) announced it was launching a general strike.

**¶15.** (U) Mamadou Mbodji, Secretary General of the National Union of Teachers of Senegal (SNEMS), quickly took the lead and publicly described the reasons for the strike as "grave injustices, discrimination, and the unspeakable fate of which middle/secondary school teachers are victims." He said teachers felt marginalized and their careers demeaned when judges, health workers, and other public servants with the same level of education as teachers were given salary increases but teachers were not. SNEMS said all teaching would stop for three days and threatened to boycott baccalaureate exams if demands for a more equitable housing allowance, establishment of a career plan favorable to promotions, research stipends, and revision of the fee structure paid to teachers for administering baccalaureate exams were not met.

**¶16.** (U) By the end of June, the GOS offered the unions 45,000 CFAF (USD 90) monthly housing allowance and 3,000 parcels of land on which to build homes -- up from the current 35,000 CFAF that has been the norm since 1988, but teachers insisted on an allowance of 50,000 CFAF (USD 100) and refused to grade the baccalaureate exams. On August 5, the unions consented to grade the exams as a "good-will gesture" but will continue to withhold grades and refuse to hold classes until their

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demands are met or until the end of the year. Last week, union solidarity cracked with some teachers, especially so-called volunteers, agreeing to provide grades.

#### WADE AND UNIONS THREATEN TO SUE EACH OTHER

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**¶17.** (U) After unions brought middle and secondary school systems to a standstill, President Wade agreed to talk on July 26. The two sides failed to reach agreement, and the unions announced they would file a complaint against Wade before the ILO for breach of the right to negotiate and for discriminatory treatment. Wade said he, in turn, would lodge a complaint against them before the ILO and the new UN Council on Human Rights, saying "the rights of children had been violated." He also revived the stance taken by the GOS during the university riots, saying teachers were motivated by politics. During a union meeting on August 4, participants discovered a police Information Bureau spy from the police "Information Bureau" in their midst. According to media reports, once discovered, the spy provoked an altercation, resulting in the arrest of one union member, Farba Sy, who was released shortly thereafter. Minister of Education Moustapha Sourang threatened to suspend salaries of striking teachers throughout the month of August.

#### THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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**¶18.** (SBU) Around the same day in May that SNEMS called for general strike, the National Office for Cleaning Up Senegal (ONAS) released a report in which it found that 17 percent of school bathrooms are not functional due to lack of water, and 30 percent are poorly maintained. Many schools completely lack running water, school supplies, and adequate infrastructure. Others have trouble attracting and keeping teachers on staff for lack of housing and food.

**¶19.** (U) The school system is also marked by relatively low enrollment and literacy rates, as well as high drop-out rates. According to GOS and UNESCO statistics, with the GOS devoting 40 percent of its budget to education, the primary

school enrollment rate for 2005-2006 was 82.5 percent for the public schools; the middle-school enrollment rate was 31.9 percent; and the secondary-school enrollment rate was 10.9 percent. The Ministry of Education estimates that the school enrollment rate for 2005-2006 was 95 percent if one includes the 600,000 students in &Franco-Arab schools.<sup>8</sup> UNESCO reports the literacy rate is 46.4 percent, with more literate men than women, although a leading Islamic educator claimed to us that the literacy rate would be far higher if literacy in Arabic were also taken into consideration.

#### GOVERNMENT SALARY STATISTICS

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¶10. (SBU) One issue that has plagued the educational system for the past decade is its two-track system of teachers. When the Government first expanded the school system in the 1990s, it decided to recruit over 500 teachers within a short time. To do so, the GOS created a volunteer corps, which agreed to teach in primary schools for half the usual salary.

More than 30,000 people volunteered when the program was launched. The intent was to give volunteers a two-year contract, renewable for two more years. After four years, they could convert to regular civil service status, and the volunteer corps would be phased out. The program, however, was never phased out; and it created a huge disparity in salary between volunteers and other teachers. This led to disgruntlement among volunteers. The quality of education suffered. As seen in the enrollment statistics in paragraph 8, and as one former Ministry of Education official has noted, only 50 percent of primary school students pass the test needed to progress to middle school.

¶11. (SBU) The two-tier salary system introduced in many West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU or UEMOA) countries after the 1994 CFAF devaluation has created as many problems as it has solved. The disparity contributed to this year's strikes. Ironically, however, the better paid teachers are more politicized and more vocal, with several deputies, mayors, and presidents of regional councils hailing from their ranks. In fact, the pugnacity of the teachers, unions, with annual strikes dating back to 1976, has resulted in a significant salary disparity relative to other public sector employees; for example, health workers with the same level of education now earn 35 percent less than teachers.

#### COMMENT

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¶12. (SBU) The educational system continues to suffer from serious weaknesses. At the primary and secondary levels, salaries and school conditions are barely livable. There is not yet enough room in the schools or enough teachers to accommodate all those who want to attend school. Campus living conditions are poor, and there is not enough employment available for students who graduate. At least one journalist described the crisis as causing Senegalese "to tremble" or to emigrate. President Wade considers education to be one of his areas of greatest achievement, and many Senegalese view education as the bedrock of a better future for themselves and their children. The crises of this past year have shaken the system and made many wonder if there really is a better future ahead.

¶13. (SBU) In spite of the concerns, primary-, middle- and secondary-school enrollments are up. The Minister of Education and UCAD Rector Abdou Salam Sall, have visions of what the Senegalese educational system should be, and Sall notes that the university system is still sufficiently strong to attract numerous students from other countries to study here. END COMMENT.

#### THE MISSION'S EFFORTS

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¶14. (U) The U.S. Mission has long labored to address the problems. We persuaded the Ministry of Education to match

our new assistance dollar for dollar, when devoting 40 percent of the government budget to education already represents a huge investment. Eighty-five percent of that budget pays salaries; scholarships and other assistance utilize another 10 percent, leaving just five percent of the budget to improve the quality of education. Our current strategy focuses on building middle schools, providing scholarships for girls, increasing involvement of communities in school management, modernizing the curriculum and teaching techniques, providing textbooks, exchanging faculty, strengthening and expanding the teaching of English, and assisting Koranic schools to improve health conditions and build linkages to the communities in which they are located.

JACOBS